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ABSTRACT

Need exists in the area of child psychology for improved understanding of the world of children. While the developmental theories of Jean Piaget and Margaret Mahler contain truth, they should not yet be taken as explanatory. Explanatory theory should be based on the rigorous and naturalistic exploration of lived experiences as well as on tests of narrowly defined hypotheses. Pretheoretic in nature, phenomenological research can facilitate the expansion and development of more adequate theory building. Since the thing studied determines method in phenomenological research, it is desirable that basic tenets of the phenomenological approach be known, particularly as they apply to understanding the child's world. Guidelines provided in this discussion are intended to direct the concerns of researchers following a topic from the point of rational discourse through a process of empirical observation and data collection to culmination in a set of hypotheses intended to guide future research and theory building. These guidelines are organized under the following procedural headings: (1) identify an important topic; (2) identify participants; (3) observe and interact with participants; (4) derive results (organize, analyze, and interpret data); and (5) generate and enumerate hypotheses. (RH)

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# Phenomenological Research with Children: Guidelines to Follow and Implications for the Practitioner

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There is a need in the area of child psychology for improved understanding of the child's world. We have measured, monitored, categorized and enumerated developmental stages of childhood. Our experimentations have been primarily based on hypotheses generated by theories of adult behavior. cognition, or personality dynamics. Jean Piaget (1954, 1969, & 1976) and Margaret Mahler (1975) represent a significant force in the evolution of developmental theory. Their respective approaches have yielded findings regarding cognitive maturation and object relatedness. The former's results alert us to the fact that perception and interactive competency change, and normally increase through childhood. The latter's work has clarified the important process of a child's dissociation from its mother (Mahler, 1975) and discovered some ways that children resolve this stage in their development. The theories developed as a result of these studies can, but should not yet be taken as explanatory of the processes of knowledge acquisition and the development of interpersonal bonding. These perspectives contain truth, but only a part. Our method is integral in the determination of meaning (Romanyshyn, 1971) and ultimately theory. Multi-variable theory needs advancement (Royce, 1976), and if we are truly to see an adequate picture of how childhood is lived, we must break from the biases of any single-minded theoretical approach.

Theory, like all knowledge has its roots in common sense (Pepper, 1942), and common sense is derived from the "soil of

observation," our experiences (Feigl, 1970, pp. 3-16). Analyzing theoretical development, Kuhn (1962) and Watson (1967) concluded that psychology as a science is still pre-paradigmatic. The "soil" is still rich with new ideas. We must continue to view childhood from varying perspectives so that we may expand our current inadequate theories. It is the intention of this author, to encourage, facilitate and conduct scientific investigations of the child's world of everyday experiences in search of theory based in a broad sense of reality. This intention can be justified quite simply: We cannot move on to strong explanatory theory (Royce, 1983) until observable empirical correlations are substantial enough to allow it. The goal of developing explanatory theory must be fulfilled by rigorously and naturally exploring lived experiences as well as testing narrowly defined hypotheses. Unlike the theoretical research of either Piaget or Mahler, phenomenological investigations are defined by their pretheoretical nature. Phenomenological research with children will generate hypotheses that are derived from the only undeniably demonstrable source, children's lives.

Mahler's work is limited by her concern for the expansion and refinement of her area of psychoanalytic investigation. She "cannot worry that somewhere else in the data there lies something that will present a further complication" (Mahler, 1975, pg. 248). This is necessary to the task of testing hypotheses. Aspects of the data relevant to the theory are attended to, while "irrelevant" data is disregarded. Mahler's

work, though valuable and important, is limited in scope and applicability.

Piaget emphasized cognition as taking precedence over lived experience. He thought, "the brute facts of immediate experience are invariably misleading" (Piaget, 1969, pg. 70). For Piaget, the construction of a new reality by reflection is "more real" than the lived experience of which it was borne (Kestenbaum, 1974). Considering feelings as mere catalysts for cognitive activity, Piaget provides a view of childhood that is static and "blinded" to the richness of early life experiences.

A particular aspect of controversy between Piaget's approach to method and that of phenomenology regarding language development (Piaget, 1969) and acquisition (Merleau-Ponty, 1973) lies in the former's reliance on children's mastery of formal grammatical language and expression of logical concepts as demonstration of their ability to think systematically . Such a view lends itself to the development of normative comparisons, which when indiscriminately reapplied to pedagogical situations leads to stultification by rigidifying standards of education. Phenomenology on the other hand, while recognizing the importance of language development looks beyond a chronological mapping out of the usual accomplishment of adult skills (Nel, 1973).

Formal language grows out of an empathic human inter-relationship of the child with their world and not merely in

accord with a biological clock and a set of grammatical syntactical conceptual rules. Phenomenologists recognize empathy as the key underlying structure for language development (Husserl, 1935, Toulemont, 1962, Sancipriano, 1965, & Allen, 1976). Piaget's reliance on formal cognition resulted in his disavowal of thought before spoken language (Piaget, 1969, pg.4, & 1976, pg.11). His methods of research, therefore restrict the investigation of human meaning to the realm of conceptual maturation and the child's development of adult cognitive structures.

Phenomenological research can facilitate the expansion and development of more adequate theory building, and there are many ways to do phenomenological research. Since the thing studied determines the method in phenomenology, there can be no specific way to conduct research before considering the nature of the subject to be studied. Predetermined tools of assessment, measurement, or interpretation are antithetical to good phenomenological research. It is therefore desirable to become aware of basic tenets of the phenomenological approach, particularly as they apply to understanding the world of children, before attempting to conduct phenomenological research with children. This paper does not elaborate on these issues, but rather contains a set of guidelines. (A more developed explanation and demonstration will be available in my forthcoming dissertation:

The Phenomenology of Childhood: A Paradigm for Research - "Conversing with Infants")

Below are guidelines for doing phenomenological research in psychology, which are derived from reviewing philosophical, theoretical and research literature. The roots of phenomenological psychology lie in a strong philosophical tradition (Allen, 1976, Bannan, 1967, Copleston, 1965, Gurwitch, 1966, Husserl, 1925, 1935 & 1962, Levinas, 1973, Natanson, 1973, Rubins, 1962, & Soloman, 1972a & 1972b) and such writings emphasize a process of "thinking about" issues, for example "knowing" and "being." Other work in phenomenology has blended a concern for empirical references with the usual rational discourse of philosophy (Elkin, 1966, Flannery, 1977, 1978, & 1980, Merleau-Ponty, 1962, 1964, & 1973, Speir, 1970, & Straus, 1966). In Giorgi's interpretation of phenomenological psychology as a "human science" (1970a, 1970b, 1971a, & 1971B) the possibility emerges of investigating human meaning in a rigorous scientific manner. There have been several studies demonstrating the application of Giorgi's approach with children (Bell, 1970, Benswanger, 1975 & 1979, Jenkins-Monroe, 1979, Kuba, 1981) and others with similar concern for provision of naturalistic data (Bosch, 1970, Katz, 1936, Laing, 1977, & Wertz, 1981). The guidelines provided her. are intended to direct the concerns of the researcher interested in following a topic from the point of

rational discourse, through a process of empirical observation and data collection, to a culmination in a set of hypotheses intended to guide future research and theory building.

## The Guidelines for Doing (Practical-Empirical-Psychological) Research with Children

Identify an Important Topic:

- The topic should be in the world of lived experience and not based in theoretical construction.
- Preferably choose from uncharted, unresolved, or constricted areas of theoretical development.
- Researcher should clearly enumerate his/her intentions.
- Literature in the topic area must be reviewed.

Identify Participants:

- Must study child(ren) and/or aspects of their world.
- Gather a phenomenological history of the subject(s) with regard to the topic area. - Include in the study relevant others of the child's world for the topic area. - Researcher identifies own biases regarding the topic (known as an epoche').

Observe & Interact

with Participants:

- Use the actual usual setting appropriate to the study topic (place, time, & persons).
- Researcher must maximize noninterference and acceptance.
- Observe interactions of child: child/parent(s), child/other(s), & child/environment.
- Talk to and interact with the child (as possible, depending on their abilities) to ascertain their perceptions.
- Also interview or otherwise interact with others in the child's life regarding their perceptions of the child's experience.
- Several means of accumulating data: talking (audiotape & notes), watching (videotape, photos, notes), writing (narratives, journals, drawing), etc.
- Any or all participants may be data collectors. Its best to be guided by what feels comfortable to all involved.
- Data collection plan should be semi-structured and fluid.

Derive the Results -

Organize, Analyze &

Interpret Data:

- Data by and of the child are primary.
- Data on the child by others are secondary.
- Data should first be treated separately for each child.
- Meaning should be extracted using strict adherence to the evidence, usually conducted in a step-wise fashion.
- Meanings may then be integrated to assess common trends across children. The analyst is cautioned: corroboration alone does not indicate the veracity of results.
- All results must be verifiable from the data and not derived from a participant's bias.

Generate & Enumerate

Hypotheses:

- Hypotheses should be tied to clinical and theoretical issues.
- Implications for application to treatment and future research should be discussed.
- Also discuss the relevance to existing theories for expansion and possible integration and building of multi-variable theory.

The primary intention of these guidelines is to facilitate the development of theory that relates to real and important issues for the practice of child psychology and the development of intervention strategies which reflect a sensitivity to the actual problems inherent in providing help to children who need it. There are already some fine examples of the phenomenological approach in action (Gardner, 1975, Leboyer, 1975, Nel, 1973, & Verny, 1981).

This brief paper is a beginning of the project mentioned. An application and refinement of the phenomenological approach to psychological research with children will hopefully result in more meaningful theories and more helpful and relevant clinical interventions. And as with all research of children we may find some important answers by better understanding the earliest processes involved in the awakening to life.

Suggested readings:

Dreyfus, H.L., & Rabinow, P. (1982). Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. - (a good discussion of current issues in phenomenological philosophy regarding also Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, & Heidegger)

Misiak, H., & Sexton, V.S. (1973). Phenomenological, Existential and Humanistic Psychologies. Grune and Stratton. - (a clear overview of history, persons, & concepts)

Speigelberg, H. (1972). Phenomenology in Psychology and Psychiatry. Evanston: Northwestern University Press. - (a detailed sophisticated overview of history, persons, & concepts)

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